

Brookline Preservation Commission

Demolition Application Report

Address: 540 Chestnut Hill Avenue
Applicant: Terry & Tom Hamilton
Building Type: House (Partial)
National Register Listing (if Applicable): Fisher Hill NRD



Historical/Architectural Significance:

The residence at 540 Chestnut Hill Avenue was designed by architect Clifford Allbright, constructed in 1949 by builder Carl Hall for Newton H. Sobin, the first owner of the home. Newton Sobin was born in Russia in 1897, immigrating to the United States in 1908 and becoming a citizen in 1941. Sobin was an executive in the chemical industry, serving as the President and Treasurer of both the Fulton Analon Corporation and the New England Products Co. by 1948.

Architect Clifford Allbright graduated from MIT in 1907, appearing in Boston business directories from 1919 until 1945, suggesting that this house was designed at the end of his career. Allbright was the President of Boston Architectural Center in the 1940's, his most well-known work was Shawsheen Village, a self-sufficient company town for the American Woolen Company constructed from 1918-1923. Allbright was responsible for "Brick Shawsheen", a collection of 200 individually designed homes for company executives. In Brookline, Allbright designed the Brown Motors Company Building at 890-894 Commonwealth Avenue in 1920 as well as several residences in south Brookline. 141 Seaver Street, built in 1951, is a French Eclectic design sharing similar materials, rooflines & configuration. Both homes were designed by Allbright in the post war period using French Revival styles to blend into the 19th & early 20th century homes that characterize the Fisher Hill neighborhood.

The residential neighborhood of Fisher Hill was laid out in 1884 by Frederick Law Olmstead. It received its name from an early 19th century landowner & resident, Francis Fisher, a commission merchant. Fisher Hill has traditionally been the

home of some of Brookline's more illustrious citizens. With a few notable exceptions, the area presents a comprehensive collection of late 19th and early 20th century domestic architectural styles: Queen Anne, Shingle, Jacobethan, Colonial, Georgian and Medieval Revival, and Craftsman. Though not detailed with an individual inventory form, 540 Chestnut Hill Avenue is listed as a contributing resource to the historic district on the Fisher Hill inventory form.

The sprawling 2 story French Provincial style house rises from a concrete foundation to a steeply pitched slate hipped roof. The brick exterior is painted white, a characteristic finish for the style. Dormers on the second floor are fully contained in the body of the roof and clad in clapboards. A small cross gable frames the main entrance on the north facing driveway elevation. The asymmetrical façade is reminiscent of French farmhouses, low-slung and rambling. The roofline, drawn down to the top of the first floor windows, disguises the size of the home, its low massing spread over three wings.

The massing of the home has grown more complex over the years, with multiple additions added by different owners. The first additions were completed in 1970 & 1971 when R. Sonnabend, the second owner of the home, employed builder Louis Wolk to construct 25'x10' and 40'8" x22' expansions. In 1990 an 8'6"x 14'3" sunroom was added. A large addition to the middle of the driveway elevation in 2008 radically reconfigured the spatial arrangement and aesthetic of the former main entrance. The 2 story addition, clad in clapboards with wooden quoins, features French doors at the first floor in lieu of windows topped with round fanlights, a two-story entrance composition common to the Millennium Mansion style. The shallow pitch of the gable roofline accentuates the verticality of the addition; a sharp contrast to the existing home's low profile and steep roof pitch. In 2015, a single story brick expansion of the dining room was added with a pergola in the courtyard space. This addition is more sensitively rendered, using materials and appropriate scale to blend into the existing home.

The house at 540 Chestnut Hill Avenue meets the following criteria for an initial determination of significance:

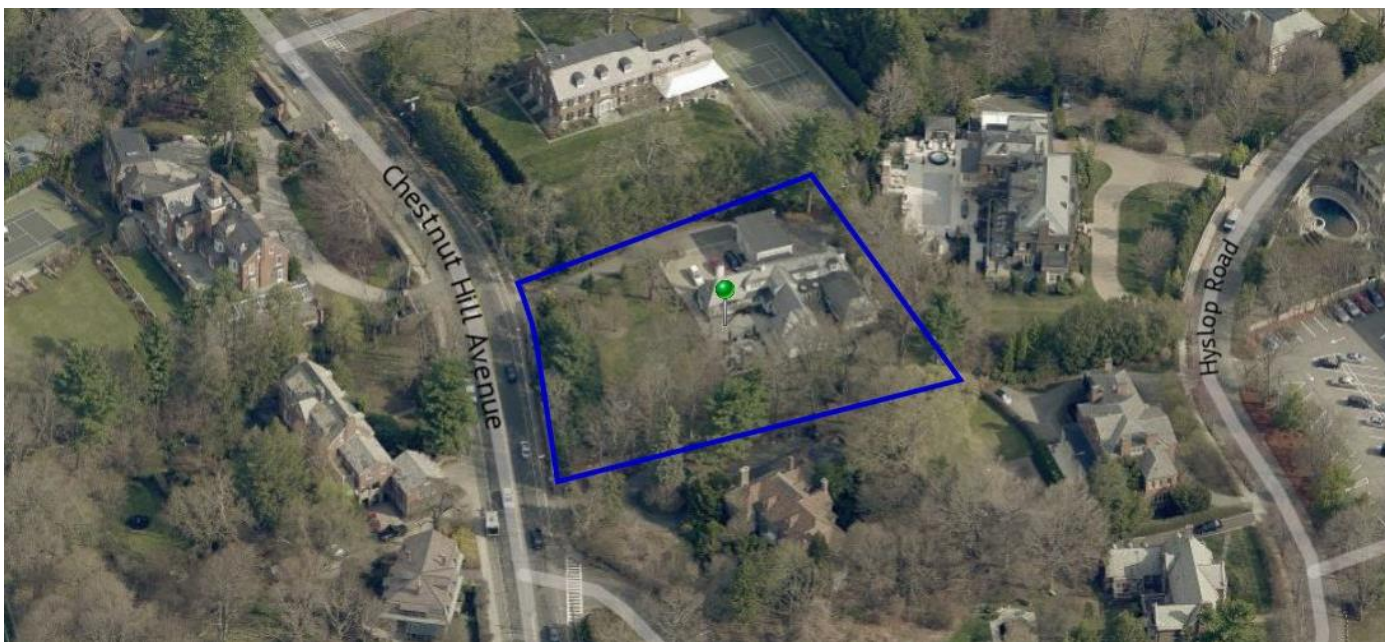
- b. The building is listed on or is within an area listed on the National or State Registers of Historic Places; is eligible for listing on the National or State Registers of historic places; or is a building for which a preliminary determination of eligibility has been made by the Massachusetts Historical Commission;
- c. The building is associated with one or more significant historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the town or Commonwealth; and
- d. The building is historically or architecturally significant in terms of its period, style, method of construction, or its association with a significant architect or builder, either by itself or as part of a group of buildings.

The building at 540 Chestnut Hill Avenue retains integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, materials, and workmanship.

On June 18th, 2020 the Commission voted to uphold the initial determination of significance for 540 Chestnut Hill Avenue, imposing an 18 month demolition stay. The applicant has requested a lift of stay based on plans for a 10' x 23' addition to the rear of the current master bedroom wing to provide a walk-in closet. The 1 ½ story addition will over frame the existing master bedroom roof with a 7:12 pitch standing seam copper roof, creating two new hip roof lines and adding a dormer at the center of the addition's right elevation. The foundation will be clad in brick painted to match existing and the walls clad in cedar shingles, stained to match the color of the brick. Seven new windows will be installed in the addition, all Marvin Ultimate Casements.



Aerial view of 540 Chestnut Hill Avenue, looking east.



Aerial view of 540 Chestnut Hill Avenue, looking north.



Aerial view of 540 Chestnut Hill Avenue, looking west.



Aerial view of 540 Chestnut Hill Avenue, looking south.



Ariel view of 540 Chestnut Hill Avenue prior to dining room addition in 2015.



Driveway elevation, assessor's photo taken prior to 2008 (above); driveway elevation in 2010, showing 2008 addition (below)





Front elevation with gravel patio, southwest corner of house (prior to 2015 dining room addition).



Same elevation showing 2015 dining room addition.



Master Bedroom wing.



Views of garage, driveway elevation, located to the rear of the 2008 addition.



